

# Sexuality in Greek Women's Magazines: A thematic analysis

Viou, M., Zeriti, M. & Kyriazopoulou, E.



Training and Research Institute for Systemic Psychotherapy [www.logopsychis.gr](http://www.logopsychis.gr)

## Background

In this research sexuality is seen as socially constructed through language and reproduced by media and magazines. With the term sexuality we refer to the capacity of sexual feelings that might include sexual preferences, orientation and activity (The Oxford Dictionary, 2013). According to Tiefer (1995, as cited in Farvid and Braun, 2006) sexuality is a social construct that is produced, changed and modified with an ever-changing sexual discourse.

Research on the sexual content in women's magazines has identified dominant ideologies that promote sexual role stereotypes, privilege masculinity and construct female sexuality through the depiction of male sexuality. In Fervid and Braun's (2006) research, women were represented as in pursuit of a loving long-term monogamous heterosexual relationship as a source of fulfilment. Furthermore, men's voices provided advice about sexual experiences enjoyable for men and what was considered attractive for men was the physical appearance of women. The latter was also supported by Jain (2008) who showed that the importance of female physical appearance and body image ideals is constructed through magazines.

Moreover, Moran and Lee's (2011) findings were compatible with the existing literature and showed that being in a monogamous heterosexual relationship was essential for every woman and that sex was seen as work and required instructions.

Most of the area of research focused on magazines whose target audience are women in their early 20's but these magazines are also read by girls as young as 13 (Brown et al, 2002, in Moran and Lee, 2011). The question that arises is whether this specific representation of sexuality is constructed in all magazines that have women as their target audience. For example, will women's sexuality be portrayed in the same or a different way in different age targeting magazines? The current research focused on the Greek market and the research question is 'How women's sexuality is presented in Greek magazines aimed at different age ranges of women'.

## Method

We used thematic analysis to identify the portrayal of sexuality in female magazines targeting different age audiences. The materials that were used were four women's magazines that deal with issues of sexuality, sex and relationships. We examined three articles from each magazine published between January and May 2015. The specific magazines were chosen because they all had female target audiences with different age ranges. Specifically the magazines selected were: Bazaar (on average 48 years old), Cosmopolitan (on average 22 years old), Marie Claire (25-34 years old) and Elle (on average 37 years old). The ages of the target audiences of the magazines were found online on their media kit.

## Results

Whilst these themes were common among all magazines, the way these themes were presented was different, depending on the age groups. The findings showed that the content of women's magazines is an important site where social norms and sexual stereotypes are depicted, constructed and reconstructed through text and language.

After reviewing the articles and taking into consideration the research question - 'How women's sexuality is presented in Greek magazines aimed at different age ranges of women?' - five main themes were identified.

COSMOPOLITAN

ELLE

BAZAAR

marie claire

## Discussion

Our analysis showed specific recurrent themes emerging from the data that indicated differentiations between magazines with different age range of target audience. In accordance with Fervid and Braun's (2006) our analysis showed that women were presented not to prioritize their own sexuality but were in pursuit of a loving long-term monogamous heterosexual relationship that ensured happiness. This finding is mostly found in magazines with younger target audience. However, in magazines with older target audience such as Elle, being sexually independent is presented as a valuable choice.

Another important theme was how women express their sexuality. Here we noticed some differentiations based on the different age ranges of the audiences. Marie Claire and Cosmopolitan that aimed at younger audiences highlighted men's needs and gave instructions to young women on how to satisfy men were other magazines with older target reinforced women to show sexual agency and focus on their needs.. This finding was in accordance with Moran and Lee's (2011) ideas who showed that in magazines such as Cosmopolitan there was no reference to women's sexual desires and sexual agency.

Furthermore, another common theme in all magazines was the depiction of a modern role of women that transcends «conservative» social stereotypes. Moreover, our findings were in accordance with Fervid and Braun's who showed that what was considered attractive for men was the physical appearance of women with no differentiation among magazines.

Finally, an important theme i.e. the acknowledgement of the impact of media and society on female sexuality was prevalent in all magazines. It is a theme that was not noticed in previous research. However, the explicit understanding of this influence in a period of time where technology and media play an important role in people's lives, might show that sexuality is also historically constructed through language as Braun et al (2003) have identified.

Themes	Quotes	Quotes
Sexual Independence	<b>Elle:</b> 'We have been through a time of financial, sexual and social-at least at a part independence. Therefore, we should get rid of our own residues...'	<b>Marie Claire:</b> '...Single shaming (behaving to your single friends patronizingly or mercifully) is more about women.'
Modern Female Role	<b>Cosmopolitan:</b> 'Personally I don't know whether our natural tendency is to live in couples or whether someone could be equally ok in threesomes, foursomes, fiftosomes etc...'	<b>Bazaar:</b> 'The last decades, the Greek woman has managed to win her right for work, for education and for independent thinking. She can elect governments, lead in the workplace, choose her partner and decide -depending on the circumstances- when she will have a child.'
Expression of Female sexuality	<b>Elle:</b> 'However erotic feelings for women can be found in new encounters and one night stands while tenderness in long lasting relationships...'	<b>Marie Claire:</b> 'You will be better in bed: a match.com research found that 97% of singles in the USA replied that their partners' sexual satisfaction is above their own.'
Female Attractive Attributes	<b>Cosmopolitan:</b> 'If I want to make my boyfriend more excited, I wear a beautiful pair of lingerie.'	<b>Marie Claire:</b> 'The benefits of being single: it's more likely to stay fit: in Britain, 62% of couples claimed to have gained weight once they got into a relationship.'
Impact of Media and Society on Sexuality	<b>Cosmopolitan:</b> 'It is as if our reality has been seriously influenced by the erotic mood of the movie 50 shades of grey...'	<b>Marie Claire:</b> 'In Carrie's sex and the city ending she wasn't single, but her happy ending included the love of her life.'

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